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ABSTRACT

Research on adult second-language (L2) learner's self-repair is reported. Repairs are defined as "structure shifts," which are types of correction or improvement where the speaker leaves a structure uncompleted, abandoning it or shifting to another structure. Two principal types of repairs are distinguished: code- and discourse-related repairs. The results of the study indicate that both quantitative and qualitative changes occur in the use of these repairs along with the increasing proficiency of L2 learners. At the higher levels of proficiency, L2 learners tend to use, in general, more discourse- and less code-related repair. Individual repair profiles of L2 learners show, however, differences in the use of discourse-related repair. The study suggests repair to be a function of other contextual factors in the discourse, such as individual discourse production strategies, L2 learning experiences, cultural behavior patterns, and communicative settings. A further research project that focuses on cultural differences in adult L2 learners' self-repairs is also cited. (Author/LB)

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L2 LEARNER REPAIRS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The paper reports on research in adult L2 learners' self-repair. Two principal types of repairs were distinguished in the study (Salo-Lee 1991): code- and discourse-related repairs. The results of the study indicate that both quantitative and qualitative changes occur in the use of these repairs along with the increasing proficiency of L2 learners. At the higher levels of proficiency, L2 learners tend to use, in general, more discourse- and less code-related repair. Individual repair profiles of L2 learners show, however, differences in the use of discourse-related repair. The study suggests repair to be a function of other contextual factors in the discourse, such as individual discourse production strategies, L2 learning experiences, cultural behavior patterns, communicative settings, etc. The paper also discusses a further research project which focuses on cultural differences in adult L2 learners' self-repairs.

Introduction

The objective of the study (Salo-Lee 1991) was to investigate the relationship between the repair behavior of adult L2 learners and their proficiency level. So far, only a few researchers have tied repair to the proficiency level of L2 learners and attempted to study this relationship in a more systematic fashion (eg. Schwartz 1980; Faerch and Kasper 1982; Stewner-Manzanares 1983, 1984). These previous studies have, however, focused on discourse-organizational aspects of L2 learner repair (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977). My purpose was to systematically explore how L2 learners at different levels of oral proficiency actually differ in their ability to manipulate language structures in doing repair work and how they organize these structures into coherent discourse.

Thus, my approach to repairs was primarily structural. I defined repairs, following Enkvist and Björklund (1989), as "structure shifts". "Structure shifts"

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are all types of correction or improvement in which the speaker leaves a structure uncompleted: abandons it, or shifts to another structure. Unlike, for example, Schegloff et al. 1977, who use an all embracing concept of repairs, my concept was restricted to only those correction activities which had structural implications on the discourse (see also Faerch and Kasper 1982). An example of a "structure shift":

was vereinigten staaten betrifft glaube ich dass + dass die + immer bezeugt sind dass + *bezogen sind* [quick] dass sie + dass *es ihr pflicht ist + die freiheit in in allen ländern zu versichern ist.*

as for the United States I think that + that they are always convinced [error in German] + *are convinced* [quick, still an error] that they + that *it's their obligation to safeguard freedom in all countries.*

Pre-studies of L2 learner data indicated that in L2 learner repair two basic types could be distinguished:

(1) repair related to formal, or grammatical aspects of language;
(2) repair related to communicative aspects of language.

I assumed in my study that the occurrence of these two repair types can be systematically investigated in L2 learner discourse.

The data and the classification system

The study investigated self-repair in L2 learner discourse at different levels of proficiency in face-to-face interactions with native speakers. The particular focus was on college students, English speakers (L1) of German (L2). The corpus consisted of 30 oral proficiency interviews (ACTFL-OPI). The interviews were conducted by two native speakers of German at Georgetown University, USA, in 1984-85. Three levels of proficiency were considered in the study: Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior (for the criteria used in the evaluation see eg. Liskin-Gasparro 1984).

The classification system was as follows:

I Code-related repairs

Phonological repairs
Morphological repairs
Syntactic repairs
Lexical repairs

Code-related repairs are corrections of perceived departures from the prescribed or learned aspects of the L2 code.

II Discourse-related repairs

Amendment
Elaboration
Abandon

Discourse-related repairs have to do with the formulation of the message throughout the text. They give evidence of speakers' efforts to formulate the message appropriate to the requirements of the interlocutor and the communicative situation.

The subcategory *Amendment* involves incomplete constructions which are being amended or reformulated by the speaker in one way or another in order to carry out the message. The initial structure is interrupted and replaced by another structure. Either the direction of the same message continues, or else there is a shift in the direction of the developing discourse (for the latter type, see Schiffrin 1987). An example:

Interviewer: welchen eindruck haben sie von trier? finden sie es gut dass man das program in trier hat?
Student: ja für eine sommer ist es gut. es ist nicht zu + *es ist ganz + es ist ein bisschen für mich zu klein.*

Interviewer: what is your impression of trier? do you think it's good that we have this program in trier?
Student: well for one summer it's ok. it's not too + *it's rather + it's a little bit too small for me.*

The subcategory *Elaboration* consists of expansions of the message, either inserted within it or appended. The speakers may perform functions that could be characterized as giving background information, commenting, exemplifying. An example:

ich war + *vor ich in georgetown gekommen bin* ich war in florida.

I was + *before I came to Georgetown* I was in Florida.

In the subcategory *Abandon* the message is being abandoned by the speaker. The speaker interrupts himself, for one reason or another, and does not continue either the structure or the message. An example:

ich weiss dinge um cia + sie sind uh + *ich habe nichts uh + dagegen dass...*

I know something about CIA and + they are uh + *I don't have anything against that uh + uh that...*

The results

The results of the *quantitative analysis* showed a tendency of L2 learners to use more discourse-related repairs at higher levels of proficiency.

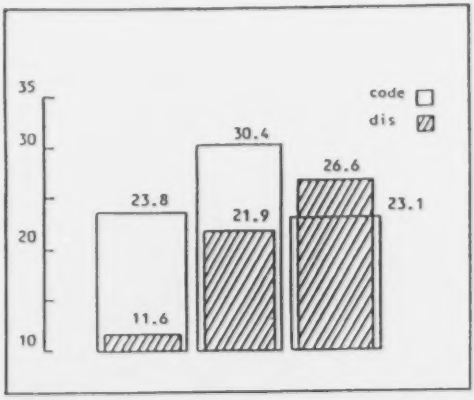

Figure 1. Code- and discourse-related repairs: comparison of means

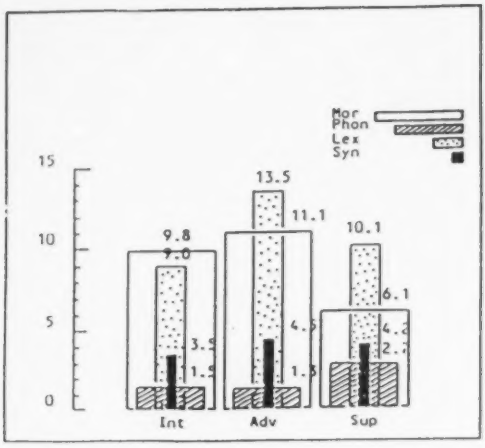

Figure 2. Code-related repairs (combined): comparison of means

In the use of code-related repairs, a curvelinear relationship could be observed at the different levels of proficiency (see Figure 2). The speakers at the Advanced level made, on the average, more code-related repairs than the speakers at the Intermediate and Superior levels. In the subcategories of code-related repairs (morphological, syntactic, and lexical repairs) a similar curvelinear relationship could be observed. Phonological repairs showed a different curvelinear relationship: L2 learners at the Advanced level (who made the most repairs in the other three subcategories) had the lowest average of phonological repairs. L2 learners at the Superior level had the highest average of this type of repair.

Within the general tendency towards discourse-related repairs at the higher levels of proficiency, individual repair profiles reveal, however, some variation in the repair behavior of L2 learners even at the same level of proficiency. In the *qualitative analysis*, I looked at the differences and the similarities in the discourse of the speakers from the same level, and also from the different levels of proficiency. An example from the data:

Speaker #1 (Superior):

[about a book] sie beschreibt + uh sie beschreibt + uh die ganze lage also + s- sie hat ein + ein phantastisches gefühl für die psychologie des kindes. und d- die art in der er spricht + oder uh + uh ich meine in der sie schreibt + dass er spricht [laughter]. es + es ist sehr subtil und + sie hat die die + die kleinen also die kleinigkeit + PHANTASTISCH ausgesucht und und gefunden und + [breath] es ist wirklich die psychologie ist + finde ich ist phantastisch. sehr sehr fein.

[about a book] she describes + uh she describes + uh the whole situation + I mean + s- she has a + a fantastic sense for the psychology of the child. and t- the way how he speaks + or uh + uh I mean how she writes + that he speaks. [laughter] it + it is very subtle and + she has picked it up and found the the + the small I mean the details + FANTASTICALLY + and and [breath] it is really the psychology is + uh I think fantastic. very very nice.

Speaker #1 is an "explorer" in her use of language, ie. she looks for new ways of saying things. She repairs a lot. Her discourse is rich in elaborations and amendments. She applies a syntactic strategy that leads her to a slowed articulatory rate, pauses and structural breakdowns. She displays with her discourse much of what Halliday (1985) calls "the ability to 'choreograph' very long and intricate patterns of semantic movement while maintaining a continuous flow of discourse that is coherent without being constructional" (202).

Speaker #2 (Superior):

ich bin in puerto rico geboren. uh + puerto rico + zwei inseln weiter von cuba. in der karibik. ziemlich schön. immer das meer und auch berge und + das war ganz schön aber + die leute sind halt nicht das was man von den leuten erwartet. [later] sie + die männer in puerto rico überhaupt. sie denken sich halt viel höher als die frauen. und man kann nicht auf einem selben niveau mit denen reden. sie sind immer über einen. die frau muss also zu hause bleiben auf das kind aufpassen und + darf also nicht arbeiten gehen. sie ist nur für den haushalt da.

I was born in puerto rico. uh + puerto rico + two islands far from cuba. in the caribbean. quite beautiful. always the sea and also the mountains and + that was quite beautiful but + the people are not what one expects them to be. [later] they + men in puerto rico generally speaking. they think more highly of themselves than of women. and one can't speak with them on the same level. they are always above you. the woman has to stay at home and look after the children and + is not allowed to go to work. she is only for housework there.

Speaker #2, at least in this communicative situation, prefers to play it safe: she often repeats the same expressions instead of finding different ways to say the same thing, she makes use of the interviewer's expressions, etc. The discourse shows only few repairs. She uses a telegraphic style that may be more effective than Speaker #1's "clause-integrating" syntactic strategy in terms of grammaticality and fluency (see Pawley and Syder 1983). The overall impression is that this student, in some instances, reduces her communicative goals in order not to reveal lexical or other code-related problems.

Speaker #1 overtly discusses her code-related problems. She has less need for face-saving strategies: her status as a language learner is also manifested overtly:

[talking about whether she would teach languages] ich habe + oh ich hab lange gedacht ob das französisch oder oder deutsch sein sollte aber + ich glaube dass mein französisch VIEL besser ist [laughter] und + da zögere ich nicht. ich meine + wenn man + über ein wort fünf minuten oder + auch in zwei minuten zögern muss o- wenn man nicht ganz sicher ist dann ist das zu + zu gefährlich.

[talking about whether she would teach languages] I have + oh I thought a long time whether it should be french or or german but I think that my french is MUCH better [laughter] and + there I don't hesitate about a word five minutes or + even two minutes or if one is not completely sure then it is too + too dangerous.

Speaker #2 explicitly refers to her status as somebody who already knows German very well (her parents are German; she grew up in Puerto Rico):

[talking about her decision to study German] ah meine deu- meine eltern sind deutsche. und: [click] uh als ich: hier an der georgetown als ich hinschrieb dann sagte /?/ *school of languages and linguistics *is ok. da kann ich deutsch studieren obwohl ich schon kann + aber helfen kann's mir trotzdem.

[talking about her decision to study German] ah my ge- parents are german. and: [click] uh when I: here at georgetown when I wrote here then the school of languages and linguistics said it is ok. I can study german there even if I already can + but it can help me anyhow in spite of that-

A similar repair pattern to that of Speaker #2 can be seen in the discourse of another speaker, Superior #3 - also with a "pressure of German inheritance": "ich bin mit der deutschen sprache aufgewachsen" (I grew up with the German language).

What do the speakers at the highest level of proficiency have in common then, with regard to repair? One feature common to the above two speakers (#1 and 2), and also in general for the students at higher levels, is the avoidance of unnecessary attention to code-related aspects. Errors, if they occur, are not always corrected. If they are corrected, the repair activity is, in general, quickly performed. If a quick correction is not possible, repair failures occur. Morphological repair, in particular, seems to be embarrassing for the higher level speakers. Problem situations are avoided. The anticipation of problems is more apparent, for instance, in the discourse of Speaker #2, but Speaker #1 also displays this in form of paraphrasing, etc. Speakers at the higher levels use hesitation devices (e.g. streching, gambits) in connection with repairs in a native-like fashion. All speakers at the Superior level pay attention to the phonological aspects of discourse: pronunciation, suprasegmentals. As opposed to the general tendency in code-related repairs at other levels, the phonological repairs increased, on the average, at this level.

The qualitative analysis also suggests that discourse-related repairs, in particular, may have a different effect in different contexts. They may be a function of other contextual factors in the discourse, such as frequent errors or lexical problems. Depending on the context, they then either enhance communication, or contribute to perceived incoherence.

To sum up, the results of the study indicate that the ability to repair appropriately one's own discourse forms part of L2 proficiency. A gradual change from code-related repairs towards more discourse-related repairs occurs with increasing proficiency. The study suggests, however, that the repair behavior of L2 learners reflects individual discourse-production strategies ("explorers" vs. "safe-players"), L2 learning experiences, the nature of the communicative situation, cultural behavior patterns, personal needs for face-saving (eg. Speakers #1 and 2), etc. The study also suggests repairs to be a function of other factors (eg. errors, lexical problems) in the discoursal context.

Beyond its proper scope, the study also leads to some pedagogical reflections. Both "explorers" and "safe-players", such as Speakers #1 and #2, respectively, seem to do equally well in oral proficiency tests like ACTFL-OPI. Outside the school environment, however, the "explorers" may, in fact, do better. Schulze (1989) reports on an experiment where L2 learners (German as L2) were

evaluated in simulated job interviews, not directly according to their language skills but according to the impression they gave as communicators during the interview. A subsequent linguistic analysis showed that speakers of the type "safe-players", ie. with lots of monitoring and few self-repairs, got negative evaluations as interlocutors and communicators. According to Schulze, repairs, also code-related - if in right proportion to the interaction - have a more positive effect on one's image and on the evaluations than eg. long planning pauses.

Research project *Repairs in learner language: a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective*

The 1991 study pointed to other dimensions of the development of L2 proficiency than only the differences in the repair behavior of L2 learners at different levels of proficiency. The shift of attention from code- to discourse-related repairs can also be seen to reflect the increasing ability of L2 learners toward full use of language in its metalinguistic and metacommunicative functions (see Schiffrin 1987; cf. Faerch and Kasper 1982). The discourse-related repairs that explicitly focus on message and interactional aspects are of a special interest in this research project.

The corpus consists of data collected in the United States (Salo-Lee 1991). In addition, spoken L2 learner discourse has been collected in Brazil and in Finland. Also available for the study are English and German data from NS-NNS speaker conversations at the University of Jyväskylä.

At this stage of the research, only preliminary observations can be made.
I am beginning to suspect that, in terms of repairs, not many culture-specific features appear in Finnish L2 learner discourse - except for, that there may not be much repair. My first impression of Finnish student discourse from advanced levels (still to be revised later) is that of relative correctness - and repairlessness. Finnish students tend to produce, in general, "finished products", much like Student #2, the "safe-player", in my earlier example. It is as if the Finnish saying "keskeneräistä työtä ei pidä näyttää herroille eikä hulluille" (unfinished work should not be shown to anybody), apparent also elsewhere in the Finnish culture, would apply to Finnish L2 learner discourse as well. As discussed above, this type of communicative strategy may not be equally effective in all cross-cultural encounters.

In cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons, certain features in the Finnish L2 learner discourse may not turn out to be culture-specific at all, but rather L2 learning problems in general. Even so (or because of that) an investigation into L2 learner discourse from a cross-cultural perspective is, in my opinion, valid. I am thinking here particularly of the applications of the research in language teaching and testing, where information of different features of oral communication is today urgently needed.

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